



FSA Now

The Monthly Newsletter for FSA Staff

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FSA's New Human Capital Plan

According to a new Human Capital Plan currently being drafted by FSA's Workforce Support Services (WSS), several human resource challenges face FSA in the coming years. These include improving the business-related skills of our staff, succession planning, managing employee performance, bolstering recruitment and retention efforts, and staff deployment.

"As a Performance-Based Organization, FSA has unique opportunities to develop a highly qualified and motivated workforce," said Calvin Thomas. "Workforce Support Services is committed to transforming the organization and ensuring that it has the right people with the right skills in the right positions. FSA's business objectives are well defined, understood and measurable. Updating the Human Capital Plan is an integral step to ensure the organization will meet its strategic business objectives."

FSA's new organizational structure and leadership were the key drivers to updating FSA's Human Capital Plan. According to Thomas, this comprehensive strategic human capital plan is being developed in response to the numerous service delivery changes facing FSA such as the transition from paper to electronic-based processes and the integration of core front-end and back-end systems. Developing a comprehensive Plan will also strengthen FSA's efforts to remove the GAO "High Risk" designation from FSA programs.

The Plan, which is currently in draft form, has three objectives: identify, recruit and develop results-oriented leaders; build capacity at all levels (of the organization) for high performance; and create a culture of continuous learning and innovation. These objectives are aligned with the President's Management Agenda, the Department's strategic plan and FSA's five strategic goals.



Human Capital Plan Team leaders Anne Teresa, Calvin Thomas and John Mondragon discuss the Plan's progress.

In updating the Plan, the Human Capital Plan Team is assessing stakeholder requirements and identifying FSA-wide challenges by conducting interviews and collecting data from across the organization. WSS is currently conducting interviews with leaders in the various channels to assess their specific workforce issues and needs. The finished product is due to be completed in July and, in addition to critical future challenges facing FSA, the Plan will establish workforce requirements; reviews employee recruitment, hiring and development trends; identifies solutions, implementation plans, and resource investments.

WSS is collaborating with the Partnership for Public Service (PPS) in producing the Plan. PPS is "a non-partisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to revitalizing public service through a campaign of educational efforts, policy research, public-private partnerships and legislative advocacy... The Partnership works to make the government an employer of choice for talented, dedicated Americans through educational outreach, research, legislative advocacy, and hands-on partnerships with agencies on workforce management issues."

We Help Put America Through School

FSA in Dallas



The FSA Dallas Team

Dallas' Best (according to Region VI staff)

- * **Best Fine Dining:** *III Forks*, an incomparable Texas tradition featuring prime beef, seafood, nightly live music, weekend jazz ensembles, and an extensive wine cellar.
- * **Best Local Cuisine:** *El Fenix Tex-Mex Restaurant*. Tex-Mex food originated at El Fenix back in 1918 when its owner Mike Martinez created it.
- * **Favorite Local Sports Team:** *Dallas Cowboys - God's team*
- * **Favorite College Football Team:** *Texas Christian University (TCU). Boy, have they come a long way - from the bottom to the top!*
- * **Most Notable Dallas Natives:** *Norah Jones and Erika Badu (highly acclaimed jazz artists). They are graduates of the Arts Magnet High School in Dallas.*

Q & A with Region VI Area Case Director Charles Johnson

What is the biggest challenge Region VI is currently experiencing?

The Dallas Team faces the same challenges faced by the organization as a whole - the challenge of managing increasing workload and program complexity in an atmosphere of declining resources. We struggle to balance between "keeping the trains running" and providing growth and development opportunities for staff. As members of the Case Team are recruited for service on projects of importance to the organization, we must juggle daily obligations in order to perform both tasks well. Our team has consistently met or exceeded both challenges.

Describe some projects Region VI staff members are currently working on.

Dallas Case Team members are actively involved in the eZ-Audit project, the ERM project and the DALT project. eZ-Audit is a Web-based system that provides institutions with a paperless single point of submission for audits and financial statements. During the past several months, Dallas Team members have helped the organization to perform 100 percent verification of documents in the eZ-Audit queue. Clifton Knight, our DC-based co-team leader, is providing leadership and support to the Electronic Records Management (ERM) project. His efforts will help to move FSA to a paperless environment. Within the Team, we are designing an internal review and assessment system that will improve our efficiency and reduce our costs. Finally, as we become increasingly dependent on electronic environments, our need for excellent data analysis skills increases. Dallas Team members have therefore encouraged and supported the growth of Data Analysis Learning Tracks (DALT) within the organization.

Which three words best describe the Dallas office? Why?

Flexible - *The Dallas Case Management Team members in Dallas and Washington, DC provide comprehensive oversight and technical assistance to the more than 625 schools in the Dallas region. Every team member has been cross-trained in two or more functional areas and routinely shares their expertise across the Team and the organization.*

Friendly - *Within the Dallas Case Team we try to maintain a customer service focus. Our goal is to be courteous, correct and complete in all of our contacts with the public.*

Talented - *In addition to our functional skills, Dallas Team members are accomplished instrumental and vocal musicians, artists, sportsmen, fitness experts, gifted crafts persons and doting grandparents!*

What is the best thing about working in Dallas?

Why, Dallas of course!

“Take Your Kids To Work Day” at FSA

FSA staff members had the opportunity to bring their kids to work with them on April 22 in honor of “Take Your Kids To Work Day.” The DC staff members pictured to the right participated in the annual event.



Kudos to FAFSA on the Web

Last week, the E-Gov Institute's Government Solutions Center (GSC) selected FAFSA on the Web for the Sixth Annual GSC Pioneer Award recognizing innovative best practices in the government.

Ethics Matters by Sean Dent

Gifts Intended Solely for Presentation

There is a widely-held myth that Federal employees may accept gifts which normally they could not accept as long as the gifts are personalized in some way, such as by inscribing a personal note inside the cover of a book, attaching a brass plate to the gift, or etching the recipient's name on the gift.

The Standards of Ethical Conduct excludes from the definition of gift: “Greeting cards and items with little intrinsic value, such as plaques, certificates, and trophies, which are intended solely for presentation.” The keys to this exclusion are “little intrinsic value” and “intended solely for presentation.” The specific items identified in the regulation, i.e., plaques, certificates, and trophies, are items that have no utilitarian value and are usually given solely for presentation. A plaque or trophy which is itself an art object or utilitarian item, such as a clock, or which incorporates materials of significant value, would not come within this exclusion. Therefore, items of value, such as crystal, glassware, items containing precious metals, works of art, books, and pottery do **not** qualify for this exclusion, even if they are inscribed, etched, embossed, engraved, or otherwise adorned with the individual's name.

As always, call Sean Dent at 202-401-6213 for advice tailored to your specific situation.

Spotlight on: Security

From May 3-14, FSA Security will have a booth set up in the Career Zone that will focus on information security. The booth will be comprised of materials from the FSA Security library, including magazines, cds, videos and books about information security. Visitors will be able to check out the materials and review them at their leisure. Also, the booth will have information about security-related master degree offerings. This is a great way to expand your knowledge of computer and information security and learn something new. If you have any questions, please contact Jill Mossman at jill.mossman@ed.gov.

FSA Now

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Scenes from the Spring Conference

FSA's 2004 Spring Conference was held at the Sheraton New York Hotel and Towers in New York City March 29-31. More than 1,300 financial aid administrators (FAA) attended the Conference, which marks the largest attendance on record. This year's conference featured a symposium on higher education access and awareness; the ED Town Hall meeting with Terri Shaw and Assistant Secretary for Post Secondary Education Sally Stroup; and a keynote address by Secretary Paige.

Below: Patricia Patterson reviews the E-APP system with an FAA in the Conference's PC lab.

Right: Terri Shaw, Secretary Paige and Sally Stroup greeted conference participants following the Secretary's keynote address.



Above: FAAs check their e-mail and review the list of participants in the Conference's Cyber Cafe.

Above Right: These FAAs get ready for another busy day at the Spring Conference.

Right: Daniel Rodriguez, NYPD's famed singer, performed at the opening of the Spring Conference.





MyFSA

FSA Now talked to new Borrower Services General Manager Sue Szabo

Q: How long have you worked at FSA?

A: I have been at FSA for 11 months.

Q: What are your responsibilities as General Manager for Borrower Services?

A: I am responsible for overseeing and providing leadership to the staff in Direct Loan Servicing, Debt Collections, Loan Consolidation and Total and Permanent Disability, and the Portfolio Risk Management Groups. As an organization, we are responsible for providing comprehensive assistance to borrowers while looking at ways to integrate the “common services” we provide to improve efficiency, further reduce costs, and support all of our customers. In addition to the 62 headquarters staff, we have approximately 165 employees in three of FSA’s regional offices (Atlanta, Chicago and San Francisco).

Q: What is the timeframe for the integration of CSB, and how is it progressing?

A: As you know, CSB was awarded in late November 2003. It is an effort to consolidate, both from a system and a servicing perspective, all of the “back-end” borrower support services that we at FSA provide including Direct Loan Servicing, loan consolidation, and debt management and default prevention. CSB combines five of our previous contracts into one. Under this contract, the existing legacy contracts will be terminated at no cost to FSA and a single, integrated system and database will be developed to support the common business practices necessary to deliver borrower services.

The CSB contract is a five-year, performance-based contract with five option years – so it can last up to 10 years. It went into effect on January 1, 2004. The new system platform is currently being built and will be released in three phases. The first phase, taking consolidation and moving it to the new platform, is scheduled for completion this July. This phase will result in consolidation becoming completely automated, which will provide improved on-line access for borrowers. The second phase will incorporate Total and Permanent Disability, Direct Loan Servicing and Debt Collection functions into the new platform. This phase is scheduled to be completed in July 2005. Phase three involves transferring the common services system from ACS to the Virtual Data Center.

Q: What’s the difference between Borrower Services and CSB?

A: Borrower Services is the name of our organization. CSB is a “system” and our way of doing business. Borrowers Services will use the CSB platform to better serve our customers.

Q: What is your vision for Borrower Services?

A: There are many synergies within Borrower Services that we are not fully leveraging. For example, there are many common functions that are being performed by our Collections, Direct Loan Servicing, and Consolidations Groups, etc. My vision is to integrate these functions in an effort to improve accuracy and efficiency, and provide excellent customer service while lowering costs for our taxpayers. The intent is to create an environment where every borrower receives a consistently high level of service to ensure they remain engaged in the repayment process.

Q: Describe your previous work experience.

A: Most of my work experience has been with loan origination and loan servicing. My most recent assignment before joining Borrower Services was leading the Common Origination and Disbursement Center in Niagara Falls, NY. From 1994-2000, I was involved in the implementation and oversight of the Direct Loan Servicing Center in Utica, NY.

Q: What are your professional goals?

A: I want to empower Borrower Services staff members through training and professional development. They are the heart and soul of this organization. I want them to learn and grow both personally and professionally.

Q: How would you describe yourself in three words?

A: Someone who keeps things in perspective; customer-oriented; objective.

Q: What do you do in your spare time?

A: I enjoy shopping for antiques and restoring furniture. Over the years, I’ve bought many pieces at bargain prices and restored them to their original condition. I’m also a watch collector. I have purchased several antique wristwatches that I don’t wear, but still keep in operating condition.